

## SIDEBAR STORY:

To me, retirement from the military is best described as a grieving process where the transition to civilian life happens gradually; it can't be forced or hurried and each member approaches this phase in his/her life differently. As the shadows draw long on my Air Force career and my family's way of life, I am reminded of the subtleties that have marked my last 30 years and our journey. Military service is a unique and challenging path to walk -- dedicating one's life to protecting the freedom of this great nation is a formidable duty. My fellow Airmen, bless you and your family. You certainly will find yourself somewhere in *I Will Miss* . . . .

### *I Will Miss*

I will miss . . .

Waking to reveille signaling the promise of a new day

I will miss . . .

The camaraderie of a wingman and the trust echoed in "2"

I will miss . . .

The chant of trainees quick timing in a cadence laced rhythm, embodying the spirit of "team"

I will miss . . .

The smell of jet exhaust wafting over the ramp hinting at the anticipation of flight

I will miss . . .

The subtle acknowledgement between professionals -- "Chief, are we ready to go?" . . . "Yes, sir" --which displays the personal preparation, crew training, and team effort required to make this mission possible

I will miss . . .

Saluting my crew chief on taxi-out for a job well done and a thumbs up reply, imparting the prayer for a safe flight

I will miss . . .

The low growl of jet noise as a plane lifts off knowing it projects our nation's power and an undying commitment to freedom across the globe

I will miss . . .

Leading, mentoring and instructing the next generation of world-class Airmen by passing on the heritage and life lessons taught to me by the previous generation, a span of 60 years

I will miss . . .

Promotion ceremonies that bestow the pride of success and the determination of hope

I will miss . . .

Singing the Air Force song to remember our resilience and our heritage

I will miss . . .

Retirement celebrations that convey the thanks of a grateful nation and a family's pride for a life well lived

I will miss . . .

Saluting the flag at retreat that displays pride of service

I will miss . . .

Returning home to a kiss from my wife and a hug from my children -- a prayer answered

I will miss . . .

The hushed silence of taps portraying the satisfaction of a day well lived, a job well done and a silent remembrance of those who paid the ultimate price

I will miss . . .

My Air Force family . . . the reassurance that sound leadership guides a trained team, that through Airmen anything is possible, and a wingman always has your six

Colonel Patrick Shope